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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 002675

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [BE](#)

SUBJECT: TFLE01: BELGIANS CONSIDER INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE
EAST

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Will Imbrie. Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (U) Summary. Since the Qana raid, FM De Gucht called for an immediate cease-fire and offered Belgian military involvement in a stabilization force. On August 2, Charge clarified Belgian thinking and reviewed US ideas on the crisis. The Belgians think a UN PKO as the best option. On operations, press reports Belgium continues to attempt to fly humanitarian supplies into Beirut, but were turned away by Israel. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In a July 31 interview by VRT, De Gucht said he was horrified by the civilian casualties resulting from the Israeli air raid. He continued, saying that excuses and expressions of sorrow are not enough, a cease-fire must come first and the political contours should be discussed later.

¶3. (U) In the August 1 GAERC meeting De Gucht reaffirmed Belgium's willingness to commit troops to a stabilization force, adding that the final decision would be made by Belgium's Council of Ministers, according to press. He also said that EU countries not willing to participate in a peacekeeping force should not be involved in the political discussions. De Gucht supported the EU resolution calling for a cessation of the hostilities without the precondition of release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers. De Gucht elaborated to the press, claiming a cessation in hostilities required more immediate action whereas a cease-fire hinged on global political agreements. He believes that a cessation of hostilities would lead to a cease-fire and further negotiations. Belgium condemns the humanitarian violations, but in an even-handed fashion.

¶4. (C) Charge met August 2 with FM De Gucht's acting chief of staff, Jean-Luc Bodson, who is also responsible for NEA. Belgium was pleased with the agreement of all 25 in the GAERC yesterday. The Belgians worked successfully to find a formulation which would not be too far from that of the US, and which they thought might allow a convergence of the US/Israeli and the EU positions. They wanted an European role (i.e. a multilateral EU role) in the conflict, thus preferring the GAERC to the Rome mechanism which only involved a select group. They want an agreed EU position first so the Europeans can speak with one voice, and want the EU members of the UNSC to have a common position in NY.

¶5. (C) Bodson noted that Belgium believes peacekeepers must be under UNSC auspices because NATO members would be identified with one side or another. They believe UN-authorized peacekeeping force is the best option. Belgium has not made a commitment on how to participate in a stabilization force; participation will depend on structure,

mandate, etc.

¶6. (U) FM De Gucht addressed the Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee and has gained endorsement for troop commitment from the Socialist majority parties (which include Defense Minister Flahaut) and the Christian Democratic opposition. Parliament appears in agreement with the GAERC statement calling for cessation of hostilities, cease-fire, and introduction of a stabilization force in that order. A formal resolution on Belgium's military support is pending.

¶7. (U) Two Belgian Air Force C-130s delivering food and medical supplies were denied access to the Beirut airport on August 1 by the Israeli government citing security reasons for the denial. MoD Flahaut pledged to continue to work on the authorization in the coming days.

¶8. (C) Late news. In response to NATO D/S46's request for NATO member (not alliance) C-130 assistance to transport OCHA supplies to Beirut, Belgian authorities have renewed contacts with Israeli authorities for approval to deliver supplies to BIA. One of the two humanitarian C-130 flights has already been approved. The flight, with MoD Flahaut on board, has landed and is offloading medical supplies from Societe Medicale Euro-Lebanese. The Belgians expect the second flight will be approved in a few days.

IMBRIE

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